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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000552

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL

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SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: THE MFA HELPS UNVEIL THE NEW
SAHRAWI COUNCIL

REF: RABAT 539

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley, reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The MFA requested the Ambassador's attendance at a meeting on March 28 with MFA SecGen Omar Hilale and other Western Hemisphere ambassadors. The subject of the meeting was the King's recent speech (reftel) and the formation of the "Conseil Royal Consultatif pour les Affaires Sahariennes (Royal Consultative Council for Sahrawi Affairs, CORCAS). During the meeting Hilale outlined the role of the council, emphasizing the consultative democratic process in which the GOM is involved to achieve a negotiated, political solution to the Western Sahara issue. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On the heels of the King's five-day visit to the Western Sahara and his March 25 speech (reftel), MFA Secretary-General Omar Hilale summoned ambassadors to a

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meeting to discuss the GOM's decisions about the processes to be undertaken regarding resolving the Western Sahara dispute.

Hilale conducted back-to-back briefings with ambassadors in regional groupings. Attending the Americas session along with Ambassador Riley were the ambassadors from Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru.

¶3. (C) Hilale emphasized the following points:

--the Western Sahara is Moroccan, and Hilale consistently referred to the territory as the "southern provinces."

--the King wants a negotiated political solution to the autonomy question, one that is acceptable to all involved parties.

--the consultative process will contribute to what Hilale referred to as the "architecture" of the political solution.

--the King has requested a dialogue among Saharawis and political parties which will enable economic, social and cultural development.

--a resolution to the outstanding issues is imperative for the Maghreb.

¶4. (C) The King's March 25 speech established CORCAS and

identified its composition as "tribal dignitaries and elected officials," including the president, Khali Henna Ould Er-Rachid, the current Laayoune mayor. Building on the speech, Hilale said that a Moroccan vision of autonomy which is inclusive socially, economically and culturally is being sought through a consultative and consensual process.

15. (C) Ambassador Riley asked about the composition of CORCAS, seeking information on the number of Sahrawis, if all the members lived in the Western Sahara, and if there were any members of the Polisario within the council. Hilale dodged the question and responded that many members were originally Sahrawis from all over Morocco and that CORCAS has a "mosaic of representation," including the sheikhs (tribal leaders) of the region, and will work closely with the Ministry of the Interior, the MFA, and the Agency for the Development of the South. When the Ambassador pressed concerning participation by those who might oppose an autonomy plan, Hilale stressed the democratic nature of the process and that negotiations will take place.

16. (C) The Brazilian ambassador questioned when the process would be completed in light of the April submission of the Moroccan autonomy plan to the UN Security Council. While Hilale indicated that the date was not important, he reiterated how serious Morocco is about the engagement process and reaching a resolution. In response to a question from the Canadian ambassador seeking the distinction between CORCAS and its previous incarnation, Hilale re-emphasized the democratic underpinning of CORCAS and said that the results of the CORCAS process and dialogue with the political parties will be reported to the King and the cabinet. CORCAS extends the resolution-seeking process and will develop a strategy for a political resolution, according to Hilale. The Argentinean ambassador asked what kind of solution was being sought by the GOM and were they proposing a unilateral proposal for the UN to consider. Hilale emphatically said

that there is a national negotiation process and the outcome will be a resolution accepted by all parties.

Comment

17. (C) Hilale, while recognizing the international desire to resolve the Western Sahara problem, emphasized that Morocco, under the leadership of the King, will find a solution to the dispute. At the beginning of the meeting, he advised the ambassadors not to listen to anti-Moroccan propaganda. Throughout the meeting, he deliberately reiterated Morocco's adherence to democratic standards and the importance the GOM places on an inclusive, collaborative process through CORCAS. There is good reason to be skeptical of this process until we learn more about the counsel's composition and by what "democratic" process they were selected.

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Riley